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AUTHOR Walczyna, Jadwiga
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ABSTRACT

This paper emphasizes the importance of educational activities for small children and discusses the issues and problems associated with choice of educational objectives and activity content. Three factors which influence the formation of educational objectives are identified: (1) tradition, (2) specific character of socio-economic conditions in which the young generation is going to function, and (3) understanding of the human being in terms of who he is and who he can become. Specific features of desirable educational objectives are identified: (1) social and cultural needs taken into consideration as well as biological needs, (2) systematic broadening of the scope of educational content, (3) positive orientation of educational content, (4) clarity of educational content, and (5) concern for creativity. It was suggested that educational objectives should serve to stimulate children's play, learning, and work. (JMB)

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JADWIGA WALCZYNA

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Doc.dr hab. Jadwiga Walczyna
Head of the Institute for
Education
University of Warsaw
Polish People's Republic

OBJECTIVES AND CONTENTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY ORIENTED TOWARD THE SMALL CHILD

We live in an epoch when special offices in almost all countries of our globe precisely register the new-born children. Birth rate is carefully examined because of its significance both on a national and on an international scale. In no institution, however, data can be obtained that would inform us whether and to what extent the birth of a child constituted a happy event for both of the parents. What seems to be certain is only the fact that the birth of a child creates a completely new and different situation for the parents as well as for the older brothers and sisters. The structure of the family changes and so does the network of interpersonal relations, while numerous duties arise toward the little human being, helpless and dependent for a long time to come. Moreover, the financial standard of the family is also affected, thus determining to a considerable extent the future of the new-born baby.

The main factor, however, which is decisive for the level of opportunity and for the future happiness of the child is a set of moral, social and cultural influences, as has been demonstrated in numerous researches from the field of psychology, medicine, sociology and education.

The scientific domains mentioned above have also demonstrated for several decades so far, that the proper psychic and physical development of the child aged 0 to 6-7 depends mainly on the educational milieu and on the organized educational activity. It is quite sufficient for us to state that broadly meant it principally influences the child's personality. This means that owing to its impact both the stimulation of inborn dispositions and the steering process are possible as well as compensating or eliminating deficiences, counteracting developmental deficits and harmful influences. It should also be reminded that infancy and early childhood are considered very important for the whole of the future adult life, although we don't tend to ascribe any fatalistic character to any of them. We would like, however, to give due emphasis to the thesis of a significant role of the period 0 to 7, recognizing all the consequences resulting from this

statement.

The starting point above requires an analysis of the objectives in the educational activity oriented toward the small child. Doubtlessly, the clarification of tasks and values to be considered of primary importance in the educational process determines to a great extent both the content and the organization of the activity.

Educational teleology, the aim of which is to clarify educational objectives, is one of the most complex branches of the educational science. This is so, because many factors are affecting the decision-process. Three of them are of fundamental significance, i.e. tradition, specific character of socio-economic conditions in which the young generation is going to function as well as the understanding of the human being in terms of who he is and who he can become. The difference in the shape of the three factors mentioned above constitutes a reason underlying discrepancies as between the educational objectives in many countries of the world. This confirms the marxist thesis concerning the historical and class character of education and upbringing.

In Poland the most precious ideals common to the

whole humanity are being stressed in the educational process. Hopes are connected with them as far as peace preservation, is concerned, the sine qua non condition of safe and friendly coexistence, of human developmental opportunity based on the mutual respect of various countries, which is at present subject to intense UNESCO activity.

It is interesting to notice that countries of the world are in accordance on the subject of clarifying educational objectives for small children who will in future take the authority in their own hands and shape their adult life reality through their own work. Let us remind a well-known truth here - children are the most important and the most precious treasure of every nation. No wonder, so much attention and care is given to them, care of parents as their natural protectors, of state authorities responsible for the future of the society and of scientists and research workers, especially from the fields of education and psychology. All of them concentrate on the formulation of educational objectives with the view to the child's well--being in relation to the well-being of the nation and state and that of whole human kind. Even a superficial review would demonstrate that representatives of vari-

ous socio-economic systems of various continents stress similar values and set them forth as the leading educational objectives.

The above opinion is also presented in a well--known UNESCO report concerning the situation of the small child, that is so much differentiated according to countries and systems. Nevertheless, it is not always and not fully implemented in the educational praxis of all the countries. Mutual understanding on an international scale is being formed as between scientists as well as followers of the view in question. Its content can be formulated very briefly indeed: the all-round development of the child's personality. Such a general approach, however, calls for a more precise explanation. In our opinion, it means a proper development of physical skills, good health and a maximum intensification of mental capabilities, i.e. of the child's intellect, his emotional, moral, social and aesthetic spheres. The formation of each of these spheres as personality aspects should recognize the child's needs and his characteristic creative activity owing to which he gains experience and thus enriches his psyche. The all-round personality development is closely connected with the child's prepara-

tion for the future social life - if we tend to approach this problem from the point of view of the social interest.

The idea of the child's preparation for the life in the society is certainly the oldest one in the history of education. Its present-day meaning has, however, changed in consequence of considerable advances in science and technology accompanied by immense social transformations. A far-reaching point of view is, therefore, dominating in the concept under discussion. Stress is given not only to cognition and adjusting to the surrounding reality in the adaptation process but also to the readiness to competently transform environment according to humanity's most precious ideals. Important consequences can be noticed in the set of general educational problems which pertain to the educational activity oriented toward the small child. In the field of the educational objectives they pertain to patriotic and internationalistic feelings, respect for working people, nature, culture and art, that is to say - respect for general human values.

It is worth mentioning that in the Polish concept of small children's education the problems mentioned

above have been grouped in three spheres, social roles to be played by the children in future being the main grouping criterion. Thus, we give attention to the child in the role of a family member, of a peer group member and of a person participating in a broader community of a local type, in the nation and in the whole mankind. It is obvious that the three roles are typical for each human being throughout the whole of its life span, although the content and role-prescription change with the changing age of the individual. The all-round personality development is facilitated by these roles if only a proper balance between their specific aspects is maintained. It should also be added that in our opinion the integration of social roles with the all-round development of personality leads to a better quality of both the individual's and the society's life, prevents the domination of egoistic interests over the common ones and vice versa, as both phenomena are considered harmful in the 20th century.

Considerations of the educational objectives demonstrate very clearly that their implementation requires such a content that would help the course of the process. We are of an opinion that even the most beautiful and lofty objectives do not function automatically. On

the contrary, they call for reconsideration and analysis of what should be selected from a variety of subject areas in order to facilitate the attainmant of the objectives set forth in the small child's education and upbringing.

In the relation of objectives to contents we can find proportional elements, e.g. the broader the objectives the richer the contents, the stronger the orientation toward psychic features formation, the more content including values in question. Before we demonstrate the working programme - it ought to be reminded that the family, the creche and the kindergarten are basic areas of the children's life thus forming the object of our interests. In many countries the group of institutions mentioned above is completed by the school. In the situation when beside the family a number of other institutions participate in the child's educational process, and this is the case in many countries, emphasis should be given to the necessity of a uniform educational activity, i.e. a coherent selection of the content which would be approved of by all the educators so that the child could develop properly without emotional conflicts. This means also that a need arises of a cooperation as between parents and

other educational institutions and of the promotion of the educational culture in the society. Irrespective of who in each particular country is responsible for the educational programme, this duty must be accomplished by educators, physicians and psychologists.

It is a popular solution now to commission both theoreticians and practitioners who work out a concept of the educational activity together in full consideration of the social and economic conditions and with regard to the educational objectives already formulated. A review of such solutions and of writings on the subject reveals a number of features characteristic for the selection of educational contents which are common both for the countries with long and beautiful tradition in the field of the small child's education and for those which are just starting the educational activity in this field. Let us consider the most important of these features.

The first one of them is that social and cultural needs of the child are considered alongside the biological ones and moreover, all of them are given attention at the same significance level. A parallel consideration of all those needs as equally important

brings about a new situation: from the very beginning of his life the child is provided with the proper conditions for full physical development as, for instance, rational diet, proper, cloting, a necessary amount of sleep, required hygienic standards and movement but also he is encouraged to get acquainted with the world of people and with the world of objects, nature, art and technology. Thus, adults elicit and stimulate the development of specifically human needs. We can say that the most of the contents owing to which the child is being "humanized" are part of his nearest environment, still they have to be found and ordered as otherwise the child is confronted with a huge mass of stimuli, not all of them favourable from the developmental point of view.

Care provided by parents and professional educators in creches and kindergartens which is imbued with educational values in the modern understanding of the term is the most important guideline pointed to by the educational sciences.

The second feature is closely connected with the former one and deals with a systematic broadening of the scope of the educational contents. The biological

aspect of the child's growth makes it possible to enrich the content. Therefore in most of the programmes the grouping of content is carried out according to the following elements, i.e. health education, intellectual, social, moral, aesthetic and technical education. It is easy to notice that the above mentioned elements correspond to personality aspects on the one hand and to the requirements of the life in the present-day situation on the other. This kind of grouping enables us to understand how many different aspects have to be included in the small child's education so that he can get ready for the duties to come as well as be successful. Multitude of contents requires a careful selection, as contents have to be regulated according to the psychic and physical capabilities of each individual child. Too many contents will cause tiredness, indifference and neurosis, too few will bring about insufficient progress and the lack of knowledge. Another question is also of importance here, namely that of estimating the relative difficulty of the contents. Those which prove to be easy elicit no interest from the part of the child, while those which turn out too difficult discourage the child thus forming a source of stress. That is why the stream of contents ought to be constantly supervised by parents

and educators, irrespective of whether contents included in the programme or those spontaneously arising from the environment are concerned. This is, however, by no means synonymous with blocking the natural readiness to learn or to get to know the environment. Contrarily, such readiness should be strengthened in the educational process which will then help in the formation of interests and in the development of abilities.

Another feature common to many programmes geared to the small child is the domination of positive contents. The children's tendency to identify with what they see and learn, which has been empirically demonstrated in more than one research project, calls for their confrontation with the most beautiful and most precious of the human values. Therefore, in each particular sphere of health, intellectual, social, moral, aesthetic and technical education patterns to follow are presented. Such a presentation, if accompanied by a proper explanation of values and patterns, elicits emotions and desires of a higher order and helps to understand complex phenomena. Emotional commitment in values and rejecting every form of evil vecome synonymous, thus leading to the attitude of opposing any wrong activity. No unnecessary moralizing is here needed, as

many examples are instructive by themselves showing how to behave, what to choose and which pattern to follow.

An important feature is also the clarity of the content. The character of the child's cognitive abilities, of his emotional and volitional sphere causes that authentic pictures and situations drawn from the every-day life are accepted as convincing, because they affect the senses. In such a way the cognitive mechanism starts to function, data are collected for perception, comparison, analysis, synthesis and generalizations. With the view to the significance of the thinking process in the child's all-round development a proper selection of the educational content is indispensable. Contents will then provide information of people, objects, phenomena and nature, elicit and activate perception and imagination on which the thinking process is based. What seems to be of special importance is the development of reproductive imagination as well as of the productive one. Owing to those kinds of imagination the child expresses his needs and desires in movement, music, words and art.

It is commonly accepted that creativity is typical

for each child, so it ought to be cultivated and developed without unnecessary limitations. Care for the child's creativity is an educational imperative for all the educators. Adults' intervention should consist in providing an encouraging atmosphere and necessary materials. Interest in what the child creates and praizes stimulate and enrich creation making the child happy.

From what has been said above an important conclusions can be drawn: the educational contents ought to stimulate the child's activity owing to which they develop their inborn dispositions, acquire knowledge, habits and skills. Three forms of activity can be here distinguished, i.e. play, learning and work, the first one of them being dominant in the early childhood. Although scientists vary in their opinions of its etiology, mechanisms, kinds and functions, they agree on the point of its great educational significance. It has been definitely stated that in the course of child's play not only the senses but also all the psychic processes are being developed. The quality and the developmental scale of these processes depend on the content as well as on the kind of play. Practically every play bears a didactic character, although it can obviously be more or less evident. To put it simply, during each play the child

becomes involved in the learning process in the broad meaning of the term. Learning is here understood as the independent acquisition of knowledge owing to which information obtains a durable position in the learner's mind and becomes a stimulus for further information seeking.

From this point of view play is also connected with the development of speech and its steering. Speech as a means of communication that is exclusively human and serves the purposes of expressing thoughts and emotions calls for a special care from the part of educators. Therefore, although the child is born with a fully formed speech and articulation apparatus, the very development and acquisition of language depend on special stimuli which evoke speech readiness and condition the acquisition of vocabulary, its understanding and its proper usage. The language of adults, if it is correct, logical and clear, becomes a pattern that the child will follow. Literary texts can also be used for the purpose, especially whenever the content is suitable for the child's age and the text itself abundant in artistic means of expression. It should be stressed, however, that both in the learning to speak and in the learning to read and write the atmosphere of friendliness is

crucial for the educational attainment, so every opportunity ought to be taken in order to express it and point to the usefulness of language skills in the every day life. Discussing play and its characteristics it is necessary to emphasize its important advantage which is the fact that it always takes place in a favourable atmosphere accompanied by the vivid interest of the child in the activity undertaken during the play. The play changes from the individual activity into the social cooperation in the peer group according to the growing age of the child and thus a network of subjective and objective contacts is established which is crucial for the socialization process. Situations appear in which cooperation, leadership and submissiveness can be trained. Analyzing the play from this point of view it is easy to notice its correlation with work as an activity, the effects of which are characterized by the objective social value. The first to be mentioned is self-service, that is the child's skill to dress, eat and wash all by himself. Later, however, the child should be encouraged to undertake activities for the benefit of the family and of the local environment. Participation in simple activities of this kind influences the formation of important features as, for instance, will, character,

self-esteem and the sharing of responsibility for everything that is going on in the surroundings.

There are numerous educational errors in this particular field, as adults often tend to believe that the child has plenty of time to learn to work. That is why they frequently discourage the child's efforts and endeavours. This is accompanied by a constant lack of patience to wait till the child performs a given task by himself. Such an approach is harmful for the child who finds immense satisfaction in his participation in various activities, if only they are appropriate for his age as far as the amount of effort is concerned.

The set of problems connected with the educational objectives and contents of activity oriented toward the small child which has been the subject of the present paper demonstrates the complexity and scope of duties to be performed by parents, creches, kindergartens and lower school grades. The uniformity of the educational influence exerted by all these institutions confirms the idea of the educative society, the idea promoted by politicians and scientists with the view to the future of mankind, to the well-being of the child and to humane relationships and interpersonal relations. The

main element of the educative society is the educational culture, the promotion of which should be the leading task of our Organization.

PWsLJO W-wa, ul. Hoko towska 14/20
Zam. 760/77 nakład 200